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KAZAK SOCIAL STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

IN this paper I have attempted to explain the nature of certain features of Turco-Mongol social structure by an examination of some of the processes which appear to have been active in their development. The study is based on information gathered during field work among the Kazak from July to October 1936.[1] Most of the material, unless otherwise indicated, relates to the middle of the nineteenth century, to the period immediately preceding the Russian conquest of Central Asia.

The Kazak,[2] frequently referred to in the older ethnographic literature as Kirghiz, were until very recently a nomadic stock breeding people but are now rapidly adopting a sedentary life. They inhabit the steppe country between, roughly, the Caspian Sea and the Altai Mountains and number, according to the census of 1926, 3,959,000. Traditionally they were divided into three "hordes" or ordas: the Great Orda in the east and the Little Orda in the west, with the Middle Orda between them. They speak a Turkic language which is classed by Deny[3] with Kirghiz and Bashkir as a "western dialect." The Kazak are definitely Mongoloid in physical appearance with evidence of considerable Caucasoid admixture among the southern and western groups. Basic Kazak culture, which has been summarized by Murdock[4] is closely related in nearly every aspect with that of the Kirghiz, Turcoman, Kalmyk, and Mongols. Historically the Kazak can be first dated as a distinct people in 1465[5] although the names of some of their constituent groups may be traced much farther back.[6] They were gradually conquered by the Russians during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and now form a republic of the Soviet Union.

Although the literature on the Kazak is large the details of their social organization have remained obscure. They are usually described as divided into a large number of tribes, subtribes, gentes and "branches" whose structure, function and relation to one another are not clear. In this study I have sought to define the nature of Kazak social groupings, the process of their origin and their relation to economic life, marriage and the family, class stratification, and political administration.

[1] Field work was made possible financially by a University Fellowship from the Yale Graduate School and a grant from the Institute of Human Relations of Yale University.

[2] The present official Russian form of the name, transliterated, is Kazakh. This was adopted in order to avoid confusion with Cossack, which is also Kazak in Russian. In Kazak orthography the name is Qazaq but I have used the more familiar form.

[3] Deny, *Les Langues turques*, 202.

[4] Murdock, *Our Primitive Contemporaries*, 135–62.

[5] Muhammad Haidar, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, 82.

[6] Kuftin, *Kirgiz-Kazaki*, 8.